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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002587

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BABIL SHEIKHS PLAY KEY ROLE IN TRIBAL POLITICAL
AWAKENING

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2447
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2307
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD
[1](#)D. 2124

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Meetings between Senior Advisor Gordon Gray and city council and tribal leaders in North Babil Province, carried out August 6-7, indicate that local tribal sheikhs are working actively with their counterparts in southern and western provinces to coordinate efforts in the upcoming provincial elections and beyond. The movement will be loosely affiliated, running as 'National Front' in Babil, but with different names and parties in different provinces. Since tribal sheikhs in North Babil often represent both Sunni and Shi'a members, they have the potential to play a key role in organizing across sectarian lines, and are enthusiastic about the potential to do so. The religious parties -- namely ISCI and Da'wa -- recognize the threat posed by growing tribal organization and have been trying to organize tribes in their own right. End summary.

Tribes and politics in Babil

[1](#)2. (C) Speaking as Chairman of the Iskandariyah city council, and surrounded by a mixed table of Shi'a and Sunni representatives, Sheikh Sabbah Khafaji explained to Gray why political identification with tribal parties is rising in the area. Khafaji -- a Sunni sheikh representing a mixed sect tribe in a primarily Shi'a city in North Babil -- argued that the majority of both Sunni and Shi'a originally turned to religious parties because the leaders of those parties, often educated outside Iraq, knew how to speak the language of elections and Iraqi self-governance. When these parties failed to deliver once in power, Khafaji continued, the community turned to tribal political organizing in the past year as "the only way to move past sectarian violence." The sheikh cautioned about the limits of this approach, saying that Iraq does not need "tribal governance" but that tribal leadership was "the only means of creating a real democratic party." Khafaji appeared to speak for all 20 council members, each of whom politically self-identified as 'independent'.

[1](#)3. (C) Tribal leaders from North Babil have been active in the tribal organizing movement, having participated in a series of "Awakening" meetings -- including the July 30 Muthanna gathering (ref A) and the July 1 Karbala gathering (ref C) -- to develop a unified position. Janabi sheikhs told Gray on August 7 that there will not be any national name for their movement, but that loosely affiliated tribes will run in provincial elections under a series of names to increase popularity locally. The tribal bloc in Babil provincial elections will be called 'National Front' (not to be confused with the National Dialogue Front,) and will

include representatives of both primarily Sunni tribes (Obeidi, Khafaji) and Shi'a tribes from the southern parts of the province. In provinces further south, tribal leaders will run under the banner of the newly-organized Mid-Euphrates Assembly, headed by Sheikh Hakim Khazal Khashan of Muthanna. The Janabi sheikhs, like the Iskandariyah city council members, emphasized that elections must be 'open list' in order for tribal candidates to compete effectively.

14. (C) Janabi sheikhs acknowledge that they have a strong role to play in uniting tribes across sectarian lines. Janabi membership is spread across the country, but is concentrated in Anbar and Babil provinces. While its membership and leadership are primarily Sunni (with significant participation in the Sons of Iraq program), many Janabi in the Middle Euphrates are Shi'a. The sheikhs were highly nationalist in tone, telling Gray on August 7, "Iranian influence in this country has a body in the South, and a head in Baghdad. In Babil, we want to cut it off at the neck." Their words toward the Kurds were not much kinder. In their minds, cross-sectarian means tribal, provincial, and Arab.

ISCI and Da'wa fighting back

15. (C) Religious parties are well aware of the threat posed by tribal organizing in the south and are taking precautions. Da'wa has been particularly active in attempting to align its platform with the tribes and to recruit 'independent' tribal and secular candidates (ref B). In an August 12 meeting with poloff, Da'wa COR member and Mussayib native Ali

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Hussein Ridha al-Alak confirmed reports that Da'wa had established a 'support council' comprised of Babil tribal leaders. The sheikhs named as part of the Da'wa council (who differed slightly from ref B) represented many of the same tribes mentioned to Gray by the Janabi sheikhs as part of the National Front. Interestingly, al-Alak claimed that Da'wa had recruited Majid Felaifel and Khalif al-Janabi, leading Shi'a sheikhs within the Janabi tribe. While it is unclear whether tribal leaders have truly been influenced by Da'wa overtures (or whether sectarian division within tribes exists), it is clear that the sheikhs are running as independents to keep their options open. When Gray pressed Sheikh Khafaji, the Janabis, and others to name their primary opposition in the provincial elections, they were very reluctant to identify any party by name.

16. (C) ISCI/Badr, which controls the governorships in Babil and much of the Middle Euphrates, has also been using its considerable clout to organize a counter-response. Gray met on August 6 with Mussayib city council chairman Jawad Qadim Jabber, himself a tribal sheikh. In July, Jawad announced -- to the surprise of many -- that he would no longer be an independent and would run on the ISCI slate in the provincial elections. Al-Alak believed that the party switch had to do with promises related to employment for locals in the Badr-influenced police services. Many other 'independents' in the region -- including the Najaf Provincial Council Chairman Moussawi, who met Gray on August 5 -- have become de-facto members of ISCI due to the party's strength. Consequently, many ISCI and Da'wa leaders are just as favorably inclined toward open list elections as are tribal leaders.

Comment

17. (C) Tribal political organizing for the provincial elections continues to be a work in progress. Tribal sheikhs in Babil, while not serving as lead organizers of the movement, will play a key role in ensuring that it truly organizes across tribal lines. Politically aligned tribal sheikhs from the south and west will be meeting again in

Ramadi on August 20. End comment.
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